



Legislative Research Training – an Overview

Background

A critical function of our NYCD16-Indivisible group is to research legislation on topics and issues of interest amongst our members, as it goes through the process of becoming law. The purpose of this research is to educate and inform us of the implications of various bills on American's lives. This information enables us to develop actions and advocate our elected officials accurately and effectively.

But I Have No Idea How to Research Legislation!

Neither did we! So we learned, and now we're sharing that learning with you to make it easy for you to work with us on this important function.

What to Research?

- Most of our work centers on identifying – and explaining – pending legislation that pertains to issues of interest or concern to members of NYCD16-Indivisible.
- Requests for searches are submitted by members, or particular issues may be identified within the legislative team (some members of the team may specialize in particular areas of interest).
- Our “product” identifies relevant bills, explains them, explores their implications, and identifies the relevant active committees and legislators who might be targeted for lobbying.
- Another important function of this subgroup is to monitor bills for any indication that they might be moving out of committee for floor votes (in other words, real action). We do this on local, state, and federal levels.

How to Research – Available Resources

- Search appropriate resources, a powerful set of which are available from the accompanying RESEARCH RESOURCES sheet.
- Don't stop there! When needed (or when inspired), use the general resources available to you creatively. Searches of reliable press or institutions can yield background, richer understanding, and sometimes even hints as to when a bill might move.

Now What?

- Summarize your research findings, in plain English, using the accompanying template. Accuracy is critical, but relax – you're allowed (maybe expected) to have an opinion.

Share Research Results

- Share your findings with the requestors and other interested parties via the NYCD16-Indivisible Slack site, including the legislative channel.
- Your research will be turned into action in any number of ways: content of the weekly email blast, FB posts, posts to our website, and other types of activities and campaigns.

NYCD16-INDIVISIBLE RESEARCH RESOURCES (adapted from [this Google Drive Spreadsheet](#))

FEDERAL		
Gov Track	https://www.govtrack.us/ https://www.govtrack.us/congress/bills/ https://www.govtrack.us/congress/committees/	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Searchable database for federal legislation. Searches, based on subject categories used by Library of Congress, can be fine-tuned using a second list of sub-categories and produces a list of relevant legislation. User can “track” results in email. • Current and pending activity in the House and Senate. Provides readable summaries (when available). • Congressional Committees information • This site has high potential, easy to use and understand
LegiScan	https://legiscan.com/	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contains all active bills in Congress and all 50 states, You can have it track items of legislation as they go through their process Easy to Use, but doesn't provide summaries.
CONGRESS.GOV	https://www.congress.gov/ https://www.congress.gov/search?q={%22source%22:%22legislation%22}	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Searchable database for upcoming, current, past legislation in the House and Senate. • Advanced, detailed search tool. This is the one you may come to use most often.
U.S. Senate	https://www.senate.gov/index.htm https://www.senate.gov/legislative/active_leg_page.htm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legislation home page LEGISLATION & RECORDS • Active Legislation in the Senate
Bills to be Considered on the House Floor	http://docs.house.gov/floor/	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bills to be considered on the House floor each week
Countable – website and mobile app	https://www.countable.us/	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reviews current or trending legislation, nominations and gives brief pro/con arguments • Lets you send Y/N support to your MoCs in email form.
Regulations.gov	https://www.regulations.gov/	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Find proposed regs, including the ones “trending.”; allows search by topic. • Easy to comment on proposed rule changes; track what happens next.
Ballotpedia	https://ballotpedia.org/Main_Page https://ballotpedia.org/Public_Policy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Federal, state, local election dates, results, voting rights, etc. by state • Policy info on budgets, civil liberties, education, elections, energy, environment, finance, healthcare, immigration and pensions, by state
Progressive Punch	http://progressivepunch.org/	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Searchable database of Congressional voting records, from a Progressive perspective. We show the performance of members within 160 different issue categories, along with detailed vote descriptions. (Shows where MoCs stand on most important issues)
Open Secrets	https://www.opensecrets.org/	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tracks money in US politics and its effect on elections and policy
Our States	https://www.ourstates.org/#pressure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Actionable info, tools to reject Trump/GOP agenda in every state
New York State		
NYS Senate and Assembly Search	http://public.leginfo.state.ny.us/navigate.cgi?NVMUO:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Search for all active NYS bills; access calendars for next sessions and Assembly votes
LegiScan NYS Legislature	https://legiscan.com/NY/	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All active NYS bills; you can have it track legislation as they go through their process • Easy to use
LOCAL		
Westchester	http://westchestercountyny.iqm2.com/	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meeting calendar with agendas, meeting minutes and lists of

County Legislators	Citizens/calendar.aspx http://westchesterlegislators.com/interactive-maps.html	legislators • County district maps
Yonkers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • http://www.yonkersny.gov/government/city-council/city-council-members • http://www.yonkersny.gov/government/departments/city-clerk/city-council-documents 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yonkers City Council Members • Yonkers City Council Documents
New Rochelle	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • http://www.newrochelleny.com/directory.aspx?did=32 • http://www.newrochelleny.com/Archive.aspx?AMID=36 • http://www.newrochelleny.com/99/Watch-Council-Meetings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NR Council Members • NR Council meeting Agendas • NY Council Meetings (video)
Scarsdale	http://scarsdale.com/agendacenter	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agenda Center
Rye City	https://www.egovlink.com/rye/docs/menu/home.asp	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agenda & Packets:
NYC, NYS Legislation Search Tips	http://www.nycbar.org/images/stories/pdfs/Legislative/searchingtrackinglegislationtips.pdf	A few tips on NYS legislative research from the NYC Bar Association

Research Report Template

Issue Researched	To be completed by the legislative researcher	
Federal, NYS, Other State or Local	To be completed by the legislative researcher	
Bill #	To be completed by the legislative researcher	
Bill Title	To be completed by the legislative researcher	
Sponsors – include legislators name and state/district	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To be completed by the legislative researcher • 	
Where is this bill in the process (e.g., in which committee? If passed by one chamber, which one?)	To be completed by the legislative researcher	
Synopsis	To be completed by the legislative researcher	
Which legislators to thank – include legislators name and state/district	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To be completed by the requestor • • • • 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To be completed by the requestor • • • •
Which legislators to lobby – include legislators name and state/district	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To be completed by the requestor • • • • 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To be completed by the requestor • • • •

LEGISLATIVE RESEARCH WORKFLOW (an intro to the process by Bob Volin)

Sources:

- “**NYCD16-INDIVISIBLE RESEARCH RESOURCES**”: a Word document where I have collected links to websites that point to information at federal, state, and local levels. Each link is accompanied by a brief description of what it does and perhaps a sense of its utility. The link below provides access and allows you to edit.

Notes on some of these sources

- For **federal** legislation, I generally go to <https://www.govtrack.us/congress/bills/> first. The FIND A BILL tab lets you search by bill number or by text search (subject areas are conveniently displayed). Play around with the advanced search options – you’ll get the feel for what’s useful in fairly short order. Don’t bother changing the sort algorithm: “special sauce” works fine.
 - Using the advanced search options, you’ll notice that you can select by status: most bills that are introduced (there are thousands) are referred to committee right away, so that’s more or less the same as Introduced. We can try to narrow our choices to bills that are more likely to come to a floor vote by selecting for those that have been “Ordered Reported by Committee.” The bills most likely to see quick action are those that have passed one chamber and are up for consideration by the other (for example, the AHCA passed the House and is now torturing members of the Senate). Look for that by checking “Passed House.”
 - Once you select a bill from the search results you’ll get to a screen that will have three or four tabs under the bill’s title. You’ll be on the Overview page. There will also be “Details” and “Text” pages. If you’re lucky, the second tab will be a “Summary.”
 - When reading summaries, pay attention to who wrote them. If written by the sponsor, be skeptical. If written by GovTrack, you can pretty much accept it. If written by the Library of Congress, you’ll usually wish they had written more.
 - If there is no summary, then you’ll be forced to read the text. My sympathies.
 - Text of bills is often Orwellian (but not as Orwellian as the titles). Moreover it is difficult to know what they are talking about, because these bills are most often amendments to other laws, which are referenced only by Federal Register page numbers. Sadly, you may have to follow those links down the rabbit hole to see what’s going on. Fun? It helps to remember the mission....
 - Speaking of “the mission,” be aware that we’ll be trusting you to make sense of each bill **and** to make recommendations about whether to support or oppose. In the general scheme of things, you will definitely not think you are doing nothing of value when you make your reports/recommendations.
- **STATE legislation** searches are almost this straightforward, but not quite. If you try a text search on one of the dedicated state sites, you may be frustrated as it seems that text searches are limited to titles, not body of the bills.
 - A good way to get around that is to go to Google (or your favorite search engine) and use whatever search term seems appropriate. So for example the clunky search “barges on hudson river new york senate” yielded a page with a link to one of the legislators involved with the issue, and on that page I found the Assembly and Senate bill numbers. With those I could return to a state legislation database and get the details. More on general web searches soon.
 - The website I like best for details on state legislative information is <http://public.leginfo.state.ny.us/navigate.cgi?NVMUO>: From here you can search by bill number or by text search (but note limitations, above).
 - When searching for a bill, select the Status, Summary, and Sponsor’s Memo buttons. If the summary and memo are too vague, you can go back for the text.
 - You’ll note that most bills in NY state have simultaneous introductions into both Senate and Assembly, hence bills will often be labeled with both numbers, e.g. S1234 and A4567. On

each bill's page, there will be a "same as" link if there is a companion bill in the other house. When that's the case, the wording of the bills will be the same – the interesting thing will be to see who's sponsoring bills in each chamber (sometimes useful for targeting our pressure).

- At both federal and state levels we can search **calendars** to see which bills are scheduled for floor consideration in the coming week. This information can be important for generating calls to action about bills that we or others in the group have identified. I check those on Fridays.
- Searching the County database is even more byzantine, but it's fairly close to the state process. Only thing is that we have to search through calendars. I'll save that for another time.
- Other non-database sources: Use whatever! As you see, I've sometimes used news sources or organization websites to get a handle on how to search the state databases. But more often I use these sources to get a feeling for how the bills or negotiations around them are progressing. There is nothing in the databases that will predict whether a proposed bill will ever get out of committee, much less when, so sometimes the scuttlebutt provides some insight as to when to set our hair on fire about a particular item. Recently I spent a good deal of time trying to identify members of congress who might be more sensitive to AHCA pressure – either because of election vulnerability or stated opposition to portions of the bill, or known opposition at home, or some other thing that presents itself. We'll use that work to target our postcard writing operation on May 21st.

Why not take a dip and see how it works for you?

- Pick any topic of interest to you and go to GovTrack.us. Enter a related search term. Notice how many bills are returned. This can be overwhelming! Now go into the advanced search and narrow things down. Maybe select bills that are sponsored only by Republicans (on the theory that you're more likely to want to oppose these), and/or select only bills that have been reported out of committee. Then open a few bills and get the feeling for how to read them.
- That first result may yield an interesting finding: that there seem to be several bills that essentially propose the same thing. If you find that, store the information somewhere at the back of your head, because it probably means that someone will come up with a consolidated version of that thing which will have a considerable degree of partisan support down the line. That'll be something to track.